

legs, and in these respects it also differs from the St. Kilda Wren. Two males of *Troglodytes borealis* which I have examined measured as follows:—culmen 0·65 and 0·63 inch, wing 2·1 and 2·05, tail 1·5 and 1·52, tarsus 0·88 and 0·9, middle toe without claw 0·45 and 0·43. Perhaps one of the most striking characteristics of the northern Wren is the stoutness of its bill, for the two specimens above cited measure in width at the base of the bill 0·28 and 0·3 respectively, whereas no specimen of *Troglodytes parvulus* which I have examined measures more than 0·15, the average being about 0·14, and the two examples from St. Kilda measure 0·14 and 0·15 respectively. I have, as will be seen, taken the measurements of the hind toe of the various specimens *without* the claw, as in some of them the claw is somewhat worn, and hence, had I taken the measurements with the claw, it would not have given so accurate a result.

+ IX.—Notes from Northern Iceland in the Summer of 1885.

By HENRY H. SLATER and THOMAS CARTER.

WE started late on our tour to Iceland last summer, and were rather afraid, on landing at Sapiðarkrokr, June 22nd, that we might find the breeding-season of most of the birds far advanced. The season, however, was such an exceptionally late one, owing to the enormous amount of snow still remaining, even at low altitudes, and to the presence of numerous icebergs a little to the north of the island, that the birds seemed to be in a state of complete uncertainty. Up to the time of our leaving the island on July 20th, we appeared equally likely to meet with any given species (Ravens and Iceland Falcons excepted) with young birds, with eggs in any stage, or not yet breeding.

It was unfortunately often the case, however (doubtless a common experience), that any bird's eggs which we particularly wanted proved to be much incubated. This caused us, in moments of irritation, as we sat late into the night painfully

extracting chickens in small pieces, to vow that in Iceland birds laid their eggs "hard sat."

We do not feel called upon to be too precise as to localities, but we shall always be ready to furnish information to brother ornithologists by letter. We may be pardoned for taking this course, as one of us has reason to believe that he has already, unwittingly, done harm in being too confidential. The year after he had published his experiences on the Dovre Fjeld, he received a letter from Mr. Collett, which mentioned that an English collector had just visited the same localities and had simply exterminated the rarer birds.

+ REDWING. (*Turdus iliacus*.)

Abundant in the birch woods. We found only one nest with eggs, on June 27. We saw many young birds the same day, some just fledged, some full-grown and almost as long-tailed as their parents. Whenever the sun shone we heard with great pleasure the rich wild note of this bird all over the birch woods.

NORTHERN WREN. (*Troglodytes borealis*.)

Mr. W. E. Clarke (Ibis, 1885, p. 376) states that this bird "occurs in the brushwood of the Fnjoská." We can only say that for some days we searched this locality most carefully for it and for its nest, but entirely without success. Nor can we think that we overlooked it. The inhabitants, most of whom seem to have a fair general knowledge of their local birds, usually appeared to know of the bird by the name "Musarbroðir," but no one seemed to have seen the bird itself, or could tell us where to look for it. Considering the trouble we took to find it in different places, considering, too, the very small number and limited area of the woods in which it would most probably occur, we feel justified in putting it down as, at all events, extremely rare in the north; for it is not, like one of the rarer Waders, for example, a bird which might be easily overlooked in the vast stretches of likely marsh and "heiði" ground.

MEALY REDPOLL. (*Linota linaria*.)

We found this bird often very abundant, as well as generally

distributed, in the birch woods. It seems to be the opinion of modern ornithologists that *L. hornemanni*, Holb., is the ordinary Redpoll of Iceland. Herr Preyer, both in 'Naumannia' (1857, i. p. 63) and 'Reise nach Island im Sommer 1860' (p. 394), speaks of it as "*Fringilla linaria*, L." Professor Newton does the same (App. to Baring Gould's 'Iceland, its Scenes and Sagas,' 1863), which are all subsequent to Holböll's article in 'Naturh. Tidsskr.' (iv. p. 398, 1843). But in the last edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' Professor Newton conjectures that the prevailing form in Iceland is the Arctic Redpoll (*L. hornemanni*), and Mr. Dresser (B. of Eur. iv. p. 42) acquiesces in this view, which is based upon an unquestionable specimen from Iceland in Mr. Hancock's possession. We think, however, that the subjoined measurements, to which are added those of one or two other examples in Slater's collection, will prove that the bird which *breeds* in Iceland is *L. linaria*, whilst it is probable that the Arctic Redpoll is only a winter visitor.

	Loc.	Coll.	Wing. in.	Tail. in.	Tarsus. in.
A. ♂	N. Iceland.	H. H. S.	2.97	2.25	0.55
B. ♂	"	"	3.00	2.40	0.56
C. ♀	"	"	2.90	2.33	0.50
D. ♂	"	T. C.	3.05	2.55	0.58
E. ♀	"	"	2.87	2.35	0.57
F. ♀	"	"	2.90	2.35	0.55
G. ♂	Vadsö.	R. Collett.	2.98	2.38	0.55
H. ♂	Spurn Pt.	H. H. S.	2.95	2.50	0.55
I. ♂	"	"	2.95	2.40	0.54
K. ♂	"	"	2.98	2.55	0.59
L. ♂	"	"	2.80	2.25	0.52
M. ♀	"	"	2.82	2.60	0.54
Mr. Hancock's Iceland Arctic Redpoll ..			3.125	..	0.75

SNOW-BUNTING. (*Plectrophanes nivalis*.)

Common. We obtained several nests with eggs. The nest, placed either in a crevice of rock in some wild ravine near the snow-line, or in a heap of loose stones, is clumsily made of short sticks and tufts of wool, and is lined, like nearly all small birds' nests in Iceland, with white Ptarmigan

feathers. We obtained, about the same time, young flyers in a very interesting stage of plumage, which has been described by Professor Newton in 'Yarrell,' ed. 4, vol. ii., but, so far as we know, nowhere figured.

RAVEN. (*Corvus corax*.)

We were, of course, too late for the eggs of this bird, but we took young birds, almost fledged, from a nest on June 30; they were four in number, and had been fed on birds' eggs (mostly, apparently, those of the Whimbrel and Golden Plover) and berries, which, from their colour, could only have been those of *Empetrum*. Ravens seem to get a good many of the Ptarmigan's eggs; on two occasions we found one lying in the woods so neatly sucked as to make pretty good specimens. The Whimbrels used to attack the black robbers fearlessly when they came near their nests, as Peewits do Rooks at home. As there is a much greater disparity in size in the former case, and, apparently, a less effective weapon (for it is difficult to imagine a more incapable instrument than the Whimbrel's bill, from a warlike point of view), this speaks volumes for the pluck of the Whimbrel. As long as the Raven kept on the ground, the Whimbrels did the same. But as soon as we approached the Raven and it occurred to him that he had better move, the Whimbrels dashed at him as soon as he was on the wing, and appeared almost to tumble him over, and he soon was glad to take to earth again in a most undignified manner. Then the Whimbrels, after a stoop or two at his head, which he met by ducking and croaking, perched on hummocks and watched him as before. This seemed to be the usual procedure; but the Raven appeared to be ready to put up with the kicks as long as he got the halfpence—to wit, the eggs. Amongst the scores of Ravens we saw, we did not observe a single pied specimen.

WHITE-TAILED EAGLE. (*Haliaëtus albicilla*.)

An egg of the season was brought in to us.

ICELAND FALCON. (*Hierofalco islandus*.)

We saw several, and eggs which had been taken earlier were brought to us.

† MERLIN. (*Falco æsalon.*)

Not nearly so numerous in the north as would seem to be the case elsewhere. We never saw the adult birds, but two clutches of eggs and four young in down were brought to us.

† ROCK-PTARMIGAN. (*Lagopus rupestris.*)

Of this bird, which seems generally distributed in fair numbers, we obtained specimens—adult, young in down, and eggs. We must entirely endorse the remarks of Messrs. Clarke and Backhouse (*Ibis*, 1885, p. 376), as all the specimens which came under our notice were normal *L. rupestris*. The note is a croak, very like that of *L. alpinus*, which the male utters continuously on the wing, as well as intermittently when on the ground; and this several times drew our attention to him when he might otherwise have escaped notice. The nest is like that of the Red Grouse, partly sheltered by a trailing branch of dwarf birch or other shrub. The largest clutch of eggs we obtained was ten, but one of six was brought to us on July 6, very much incubated.

† HERON. (*Ardea cinerea.*)

We saw one near Skagafjörður.

DUCKS.

Of these we took eggs ourselves of the Wild Duck, Wigeon, Scaup (commonest of all; we once, working independently, counted 305 nests of this bird in about an hour on a space of three or four acres, all with eggs, after which we stopped counting), Barrow's Goldeneye, Longtail, Pintail, Scoter; also of the Merganser. One of us is confident also that he saw a pair of Common Goldeneyes near Skagafjörður, which were swimming in a lake within thirty yards of where he rode past them. Other Ducks' eggs were brought to us with the down, amongst which, with the kind help of Mr. Seebohm and his collection, we have identified the Teal, possibly the Shoveller, the Harlequin, and three eggs of the Gadwall, which have only once previously been taken in North Iceland.

† TURNSTONE. (*Streptilas interpres.*)

We never met with this bird ourselves, but an Iceland

brought in a clutch of eggs which we put down as belonging to this bird, an opinion which Professor Newton endorses.

+ PURPLE SANDPIPER. (*Tringa striata*.)

We obtained two clutches of the eggs of this bird, which would seem to breed sparsely on the bleakest and wildest uplands or "heiðies."

+ SANDERLING. (*Calidris arenaria*.)

An officious native having, at considerable trouble to himself, informed the authorities that we were shooting birds in the close season (a fact of which they were already quite aware), they felt themselves compelled to send us a messenger with a copy of the law on the subject, as a delicate hint to keep our proceedings quiet. This law, it is perhaps worthy of remark, is printed in Danish and *French*, although nine tenths of the tourists in Iceland are British. The great offenders, owing to whom it originally became necessary to pass the law, are the officers of the various French men-of-war sent there to protect the interest of the bonus-fed French cod-fishermen. These gentry were, and still are, in the habit of going ashore in boatloads, and slaying, no matter at what season, everything they find with feathers on it.

In consequence of this message from the authorities, we went out for a day or two without guns, and of course one of them proved to be the one day, of all others, when a gun would have been invaluable. For we came upon a nest that day, on a tussock-side at the edge of a marsh, from which the old bird fluttered off in a perfectly different manner from a Dunlin; this, combined with the appearance of the bird, impelled the finder to drop his hat on the nest to mark it, and to follow the old bird, which trotted or crept away, according to the openness of the ground, without uttering a sound, a few yards in front of him. He followed her for about a hundred yards, keeping his field-glasses focused upon her, and then returned to the nest, perfectly convinced that he had been looking at a Sanderling. He was chiefly struck with the rusty colour of her throat, with the plain white breast, and with her perfect muteness. The eggs were packed with great

care (they were, of course, on the point of hatching), and seemed to resemble what we remembered Sanderling's eggs to be. On our return to England we again inspected the plate in Nares's 'Narrative,' and sent them off to Professor Newton, who expressed his opinion that they were possibly Sanderling's eggs. When dissected, however, the embryo proved to have a hind toe. Notwithstanding this, we feel it difficult to alter our opinion as to the species. As the Sanderling, hind toe excepted, is a normal *Tringa*, it seems to us not impossible that the hind toe may become atrophied shortly after hatching. We propose to investigate the subject further, if possible.

+ ARCTIC TERN. (*Sterna macrura*.)

Universally distributed in large numbers. The native Icelandic names for the birds are generally onomatopœic, and that of the Arctic Tern is "Krja" (pronounced *kreēē-äh*), which exactly suggests the note; this is more than can be said for most of the complicated arrangements in italics so common in books on birds. The Terns in Iceland were excessively bold, and, when we were near their eggs or young, gave us vicious raps on the head, which, through our soft hats, were distinctly painful. A large proportion of the young birds seemed to die in the downy stage some little time after hatching, for which we could only account by attributing it to the cold summer, or to the presence of huge tapeworms in their insides.

+ GREAT NORTHERN DIVER. (*Colymbus arcticus*.)

Opinions differ as to the disposition of this bird. It is not unfrequently stated to be so very wary that it is only with the greatest difficulty that it can be approached in a boat. Mr. Charles Dixon, apparently (Ibis, 1885, p. 90), considers that it is of so guileless a disposition as to sit on a rock while St.-Kildans, taking it, in a moment of universal temporary insanity, for an evil spirit, stone it to death.

Its disposition appears to lie somewhere between these extremes, but probably a good deal nearer to the former. We were able one morning to obtain a couple (both males,

which weighed, respectively, $10\frac{1}{2}$ and 13 lb.) by noting the direction in which they dived and proceeding in it. Five times out of ten you will be disappointed, as the bird will alter its course under water, or do something else unexpected. The tenth, if you are very quick with your gun, you may get a snap-shot before it dives again. Our morning's amusement was only marred by a big trout choosing an inopportune moment, when we were intently looking out for the reappearance of a submerged Diver, to seize an angel-minnow trailing behind the boat. Before the gun could be transferred to the person who was rowing, and the rod taken in hand, the reel-handle had caught in some stones at the boat's bottom, there were two frantic jumps in the air, and we were minus our hoped-for dinner and a certain quantity of tackle.

† RED-THROATED DIVER. (*Colymbus septentrionalis*.)

Much less common than the foregoing. We saw the bird on one or two occasions, heard it oftener, and had several eggs brought in.

† LITTLE AUK. (*Mergulus alle*.)

Were not uncommon on Skagafjörður, and we had eggs brought in from Grimsey.

Other birds, observed in more or less abundance, which call for no remark, are :—Wheatear, White Wagtail, Meadow-Pipit, Whimbrel, Golden Plover, Dunlin, Redshank, Snipe (Common only), Red-necked Phalarope, Ringed Plover, Geese, Harlequin and Eider Ducks, Goosander, Puffin, Razor-bill, Black, Brünnich's, and Common Guillemots, Shag, Gannet, Kittiwake, Glaucous Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Richardson's and Great Skuas, Fulmar, and Slavonian Grebe.

Skins of the Coot and the Water-Rail were seen at Akureyri: they were stated to have been killed on the Eyja- or Æfjörður, on which the town stands.